

CalFresh Forum 2017 Remarks

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I share your excitement at all we've done worth celebrating and all we've got planned for today.

I know looking out at you that many of you were here last year. May of 2016, it kinda feels like a lifetime ago for me, I don't know about you.

We've worked so hard work as a group around CalFresh.

- Working smarter to find more of the hard-to-reach and get them enrolled
- Finding time for collaborative, cross-sector work
- Adapting to new technologies, new ways to evaluate performance
- Developing tools like common talking points that let us speak with one voice

And the currents have changed in the political world since last year. Just a lil' bit right?

- We've all done emotionally taxing work of servicing our immigrant communities' needs in a time of change, fear, and misinformation
- We've worried about what happens if SNAP gets block granted and more waivers expire restricting access
- We've worried about what happens to people's nutrition and health and general household stability if they lose their health insurance
- We've worried about the long-term effects of fear and helplessness on families and kids

This room has legitimate reasons to feel a sense of exhaustion and dread and anxiety about the future.

And when we're tired and anxious and unsure what tomorrow's going to bring, who do we want to turn to? We want our mamas, right? I was reflecting on the Mother's Day holiday we celebrate this week. And it made me think of maybe the most famous food stamp recipient in the history of the program. A single mother named Ann, trying to get her degree from the University of Hawaii in 1964, who needed a little help from food stamps to feed her 3 year old.

I want to quote from some commentary offered by her son, 50 years later, who'd grow up to be, as Stephen Colbert joked, "America's First Hawaiian President."

"The arc of the moral universe may bend towards justice, **but it doesn't bend on its own.** To secure the gains we've made requires constant vigilance, not complacency.

Whether by challenging those who erect **new barriers**....or ensuring that the scales of justice work equally for **all**...it requires vigilance.”

And we **will** suffer the occasional setback. But we **will** win these fights...

The idea — that one’s liberty is linked to one’s livelihood; that the pursuit of happiness requires the **dignity** of work, the skills to find work, decent pay, some measure of material security — this idea was not new...Dr. Martin Luther King explained that the goals of African Americans were identical to working people of **all** races: “Decent wages, fair working conditions, livable housing, old-age security, **health and welfare measures**, conditions in which **families** can grow, have **education** for their children, and **respect** in the community.” What King was describing has been the dream of every American. It’s what’s lured new arrivals to our borders for centuries.

But inequality has steadily risen over the decades. Upward mobility has become harder. In too many communities...the shadow of poverty casts a pall over our youth. With effort, we can roll back poverty and the roadblocks to opportunity. Because Americans don’t accept a free ride for **anyone**, nor do we believe in the equality of outcomes. But we do expect **equal opportunity** and if we REALLY mean it, if we’re willing to SACRIFICE for it, then we can make sure EVERY person has sturdier rungs on that ladder to the middle class.

The test WAS NOT, and never HAS BEEN, whether the doors of opportunity are cracked a bit wider for a few. It was whether our economic system provides a fair shot **for the many** — for the black custodian and the white steelworker, **the immigrant dishwasher** and the Native American veteran. To win that battle, to answer that call — this remains our great unfinished business.” End quote.

And today we here in this room take up that unfinished business. But today will not be enough. We need you and your attentiveness and your energy and your contributions all year long.

We need you to consider today a fresh start to another year of work, and dedication, to help deliver on the promise of using CalFresh to transform the health of this region. Today is not about taking a day off, happily out of the fray of our busy offices and bulging inboxes. It’s a day “on” where we’ll learn, grow, strategize, and recommit. In other words, **bend the arc**.

The opportunity a thriving CalFresh program provides is so clear. \$75M in benefits? \$135M in economic stimulus for farmers, grocers, and cities?

That many more **real meals** for moms like Ann Dunham who, despite living under the poverty line, tell their kids: In America, you can grow up to be anything you want to be, even President of the United States.

But brighter futures for kids and families don't happen on their own. Nope. It's a matter of how **hard** we're willing to work, how **far** we're willing to go, how **ready** we are to be a vigilant voice for the vulnerable.

Because we WILL have setbacks, but we WILL win this fight.

We've got some great things planned for you today, we'll be announcing our CalFresh Champion Awardees, we've got informative sessions, testimony from experts, games and giveaways, and great fellowship to look forward to.

But before we do, let us stop and remember what a glorious task we are given, to continually try and improve this great place we call home, the Central Coast. Now let's be vigilant, let's make our mama's proud, and let's get busy bending that arc!